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ABSTRACT

A report analyzing the special problems and needs of the Vietnam-era veterans and offering some recommendations in regard to training and employment is presented. This report is based on available statistical data along with results of small group interviews with returning veterans and meetings with officials responsible for programs affecting veterans. Problems include the reverse cultural shock confronting the veteran upon his return home. In addition, the veteran discovers that the unpopularity of the war is a social disadvantage for him and that his absence from civilian life is a handicap when applying for a job. Inadequacies relating to employment programs include: (1) lack of program coordination, (2) information gap, undue emphasis on higher education, and (3) under-utilization of young veterans. The following profile characterizes the returning veteran: (1) He is between 20 and 24 years old and is from a lower middle class or disadvantaged background; (2) He holds a high school diploma or less and is unlikely to take advantage of his GI educational benefits; and (3) He saw military service in Vietnam and received little or no training in civilian-related skills while in the military. It is recommended that: (1) The Administration coordinate all public and private programs of assistance; (2) A national public information be launched and greater emphasis be placed on vocational education under the GI Bill; and (3) Greater use be made of Vietnam veterans in implementing these programs. (CK)

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Special Report

EMPLOYMENT PROBLEMS of the VIETNAM VETERAN

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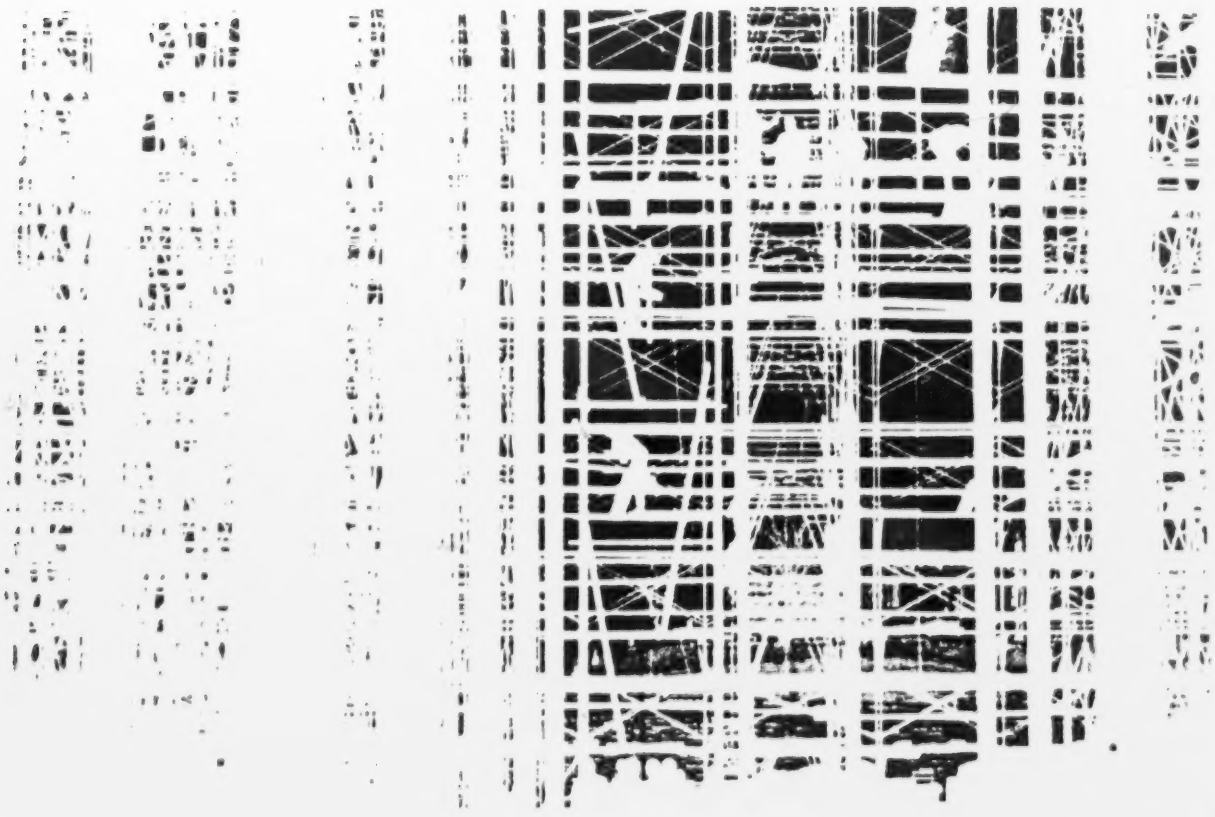

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National Advisory Council on Vocational Education

February 1, 1972

The National Advisory Council on Vocational Education was created by the Congress through the Vocational Education Amendments of 1968. It is composed of 21 persons, appointed by the President from diverse backgrounds in labor, management and education. It is charged by law to advise the Commissioner of Education concerning the operation of vocational education programs, make recommendations concerning such programs, and make annual reports to the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare for transmittal to Congress.

NATIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL ON VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

425 13TH STREET, NORTHWEST • SUITE 852 • WASHINGTON, D. C. 20004 • TELEPHONE (202) 962-0781

LAWRENCE DAVENPORT
Chairman

CALVIN DELLEFIELD
Executive Director

February 1, 1972

Honorable Elliot Richardson
Secretary
Department of Health, Education
and Welfare
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Mr. Secretary:

The National Advisory Council on Vocational Education herewith submits a Special Report on the Employment Problems of the Vietnam Veteran.

The serious plight of returning veterans who cannot find decent jobs, and who consequently feel like rejects in the society which sent them to war in the first place, should severely strain our national conscience.

The unique problems facing the Vietnam veteran as he tries to re-enter civilian life during a period of high unemployment will not respond to routine programs of assistance. We should be prepared to undertake special emergency programs to cope with the problems of the returning serviceman.

The National Advisory Council on Vocational Education believes that the unemployment situation among veterans has reached the proportions of a national crisis, and only an all-out national effort can have an impact on it.

In this report, we focus attention on the nature of the problems of the Vietnam veterans, how they differ from those of previous generations, and the need for specific action designed to alleviate some of those problems.

The report is the result of a study undertaken by the Council's Ad Hoc Committee for Training Returning Servicemen, headed by Council Member Thomas Pauken, himself a Vietnam veteran. The Council also had the benefit of research assistance by Mr. Karel Baarslag, a former Naval combat officer in Vietnam.

Sincerely,

Lawrence Davenport
Chairman

Enclosure

MARTHA BACHMAN • DANIEL BEEGAN • LOWELL BURKETT • FRANK CANNIZZARO • HOLLY COORS • JERRY DOBROVOLNY • MARVIN FELDMAN • WILLIAM GELLMAN • JACK HATCHER • CAROLINE HUGHES • JOHN LETSON • W. E. LOWRY • DUANE LUND • DONALD McDOWELL • LUIS MORTON THOMAS PAUKEN • GEORGE RAMEY • NORMAN STANGER • STEVE STOCKS • DELFINO VALDEZ

SPECIAL REPORT

EMPLOYMENT PROBLEMS OF THE VIETNAM VETERAN

Once again the veterans return from war. The situation is not novel in our history, yet somehow these veterans seem different. They do not return to triumphant parades as in the past, nor do they want them. Few will join traditional veterans' organizations. They do not fit the image of returning heros. They hear what is said about Vietnam, but know different from their own experiences. If there is a stereotype of the Vietnam veterans, it is probably based on television news accounts of veterans with long hair and hippie clothes protesting the war, demanding an investigation of atrocities, calling for changes in the drug laws. But for every highly visible veteran, there are thousands more who simply come home. The Vietnam veteran wants to do something, but he is not sure what. After the initial period of getting reacquainted with family and friends, he usually starts looking for employment. The immediate joy of being back in the good old USA is soon replaced by bitterness and indifference as jobless weeks drag by and he finds his expectations shattered.

There are over 5 million Vietnam-era veterans. Approximately 2.5 million of these veterans served in Vietnam. Most of these are young men. For many of them, life in the military was the first time they had ever been out of school and away from home. After completing their service obligation, many of these returning veterans find the transition to civilian life a difficult one, having few skills and little training that can be readily translated into good jobs.

The National Advisory Council on Vocational Education believes that these young men are capable of great contributions to American life. The young veterans have served their country well and will serve it again in a different capacity if given a chance. They want to be part of America, and the problems they experience are the problems of trying to get back in. Failure to reach these veterans with the assistance they need hazards the risk that part of an entire generation may be lost to our society or become its enemies.

Background

The National Advisory Council on Vocational Education is concerned about ensuring that maximum vocational opportunities be made available to Vietnam-era veterans. To accomplish this, it is first necessary to understand the conditions and problems confronting the returning veteran.

The report which follows is an attempt to analyse the special problems and needs of the Vietnam-era veteran, and to offer some recommendations, especially in relation to training and employment.

There have been few major studies dealing with the special problems faced by Vietnam-era veterans. Government statistics show the existence of the problems, but they cannot reveal the underlying causes or suggest the remedies.

This report is based on available statistical data along with results of small group interviews with returning veterans and meetings with officials responsible for programs affecting veterans.

The Process of Readjustment

Americans assigned to Vietnam are forewarned of the "cultural shock" that awaits them there. Almost to a man, however, they are not prepared for the "reverse cultural shock" confronting them upon their return to the United States. This reverse cultural shock and its manifestations are at the root of many difficulties experienced by young veterans as they re-enter civilian life. One young Vietnam combat veteran described his return home in this way:

> *Initially, I was exhilirated at being back home again. Getting out of Vietnam and the military in one live piece was like a cross between graduation and salvation. But the immediate excitement quickly wore off. Any mention of my being in combat in Vietnam brought reactions varying from coolness to hostility. I soon became restless at dealing with things that seemed to me mundane, unimportant, and boring. I put more of myself into my tour in Vietnam than any other experience in my life, living in violent extremes -- days of combat and days of idleness. It was a matter of life and death. Yet at home people didn't understand or care, and treated me as though none of that made any difference.*

The unpopularity of the Vietnam war places an additional burden upon the returning veteran. The young veteran finds himself referred to in print and in conversation as a dope addict or trained killer. Often his own peer group tells him what a fool he was to go to Vietnam in the first place. In his absence they have moved ahead in their life pursuits -- including career development -- while the veteran lacking civilian-related skills and training must start from the beginning as though his military service made no difference. He discovers that service in Vietnam acts as more of a handicap than an advantage in his search for a job.

Confronted with these difficulties in readjustment, many young veterans become increasingly isolated from society and bitterness sets in. One interviewer talked with many young Vietnam veterans and found significant differences between them and earlier generations of veterans. He stated:

> *They have been ignored, first as soldiers and later as veterans. They are truly estranged and alienated from their peers who never served, and their alleged friends among the dove and hawk population.*
>
> *Time and again they revealed to me their bitterness and hopelessness at being 'used', at being lied to, at being forced to serve either because they could not get school or job deferments or because they once believed in the absolute justice of America's claims. They feel betrayed.*

Any serious attempts to meet the needs of the returning veteran must take cognizance of the indifference and bitterness so prevalent among those young veterans most in need of help.

Where Are The Jobs?

Once the returning veteran has finished celebrating his return to civilian life, he begins to look for a job. Listen to Jerry Pugh, a Vietnam tank driver, describe his difficulties in finding work:

> *When I first came home, I wanted to find a job. They said, 'Well, we'll get in touch with you.' There's nothing they have; they don't have any jobs. Just like the demonstrations I've seen since I've been home. They say well, end the war, you know, stop the war in Vietnam and bring the fellas home. What can they give them when they get home? You know, a lot of people are going to be upset when they come home.*

The case of Jerry Pugh is not atypical. According to the Department of Labor, the unemployment rate for Vietnam-era veterans was 8.3 percent in September 1971, considerably higher than the 6.0 percent unemployment rate for veterans in September 1970. Of particular concern was the 12.4 percent unemployment rate in the second quarter of 1971 for those veterans aged 20 to 24. Altogether there are approximately 320,000 known unemployed veterans.

Moreover, there is considerable possibility that the situation may be worse than the figures would indicate. It is not certain that all veterans are being measured in the statistics on employment. For example, a person discharged from the Army who had no previous job, does not attempt to draw unemployment benefits or contact government agencies for assistance, would not show up in the official unemployment figures.

Statistics also show that veterans between 20 and 29 years old have a higher unemployment rate than nonveterans -- one-fourth higher in ages 20 to 24 and one-third higher in ages 25 to 29.

Not only is a greater percentage of veterans unemployed than non-veterans, but veteran unemployment persists longer. About 24 percent of the unemployed veterans have been jobseekers for 15 weeks or more, compared with 16 percent a year ago.

Looking at data on unemployment compensation for ex-servicemen, the average duration of benefits rose from 9.7 weeks in fiscal year 1970 to 13.3 weeks in fiscal year 1971. Exhaustion of such benefits more than tripled, increasing from 22,300 cases in fiscal year 1970 to 74,600 in fiscal year 1971.

In terms of job placement, veterans face a more difficult time than non-veterans. Nearly 2.7 million veterans applied at employment service offices last year; 13 percent received placement in any sort of job, a lower rate than placement for non-veterans.

As the process of Vietnamization accelerates and most -- if not all -- American servicemen are brought home from Vietnam in 1972, we can expect the dimensions of the unemployment problem for the returning veteran to become even more acute. Already unemployment figures for the Vietnam-era veterans have reached a dangerously high level.

Many factors combine to account for this high unemployment rate:

1. The current economic slump has resulted in a tight job market.

2. The difficult readjustment process described above has made the young veteran a less attractive employee to potential employers.

3. Too many young veterans leave military service without the skills and training needed to compete in the civilian job market.

4. Often the young veteran completes military service without guidance necessary to assist him in assessing his aptitudes and interests and then matching them to educational and job opportunities.

5. Government programs of employment assistance have, for the most part, been on a business-as-usual basis, providing only routine assistance to job-seeking veterans.

6. An unpopular war has led our society in general to be indifferent or even hostile to the needs of the Vietnam veteran.

Inadequacy of Existing Programs

Assuming that no dramatic improvement in hiring of veterans is forthcoming in the immediate future, new or alternative government approaches are called for to meet the pressing demand for the successful re-integration of veterans into civilian society. Although a number of public and private programs designed to assist the returning veteran have made worthwhile starts in this direction, significant problems remain. Inadequacies of these efforts include:

1. Lack of program coordination - Neither the White House nor any of the Federal agencies have assumed or been given primary responsibility for all the varied programs affecting Vietnam veterans. So many scattered, isolated efforts have cropped up that confusion and a false impression of great national effort have resulted.

2. Information gap - While it may seem surprising, most veterans are unaware of the full extent of their G.I. Bill benefits. Thus, the veteran has no realization of the wide range of alternatives from which he might choose.

3. Undue emphasis on higher education - In its counseling and public information programs, the Federal government has concentrated its attention upon the encouragement of veteran utilization of higher education benefits. The availability and attractiveness of vocational education programs has not received equal attention.

4. Under-utilization of young veterans - In terms of understanding, commitment, and willingness, young veterans are the most appropriate and potentially the most significant resource for meeting the needs of their fellow returning veterans. Yet not nearly enough young veterans have been hired by Federal agencies concerned with veterans' needs. The so-called point system of the Civil Service System that ostensibly gives the veteran a preference in hiring is, in reality, of little benefit to the returning veteran.

The Need for Assistance

What, indeed, can we give them when they get home? We can and must give them the practical guidance and assistance they need to enable them to compete for jobs in a tight economy and we must make certain that everyone who needs assistance knows that it is available.

Congress recently held hearings on proposals which would help the Vietnam veteran in his readjustment to civilian society. These proposals, which will be considered in the 2nd Session of the 92nd Congress, include increased education and training allowances; public service employment for Vietnam veterans; additional training to restore employability; equitable treatment of veterans in vocational courses; employment and relocation assistance; and outreach services for veterans to assist in obtaining education, training and employment.

The final details of these programs and their effectiveness, if they become law, remain to be seen. The time between now and when these measures might become operative represents lost time for hundreds of thousands of veterans. New legislation is as desirable as it is overdue but it will have no effect on the immediate problems of those currently unemployed.

We must make optimum use of existing programs and resources now. According to the Department of Labor's Special Labor Force Report 137, "Employment Situation of Vietnam Era Veterans, 1971," a few programs have recently been updated or are in the planning stage.

Job counselors from the Department of Labor's Manpower Administration, the Office of Education, and the Veterans Administration are being sent to overseas military bases to help returning servicemen plan their future employment. The programs will concentrate on those who need assistance most, such as servicemen with less than a high school education or no civilian-related job skill. Stateside, the Labor Department and the Veterans Administration are trying to reach former servicemen who are unemployed. The State Employment Security Offices give the Veterans Administration the names, addresses and phone numbers of veterans who have drawn unemployment compensation for 13 weeks or longer. The VA then attempts to contact the veteran to encourage him to use his GI benefits for schooling or on-the-job training.

The Defense Department is planning skill centers where soon-to-be discharged servicemen will receive vocational training in a marketable skill and job placement assistance. The training will be funded under the Manpower Development and Training Act. Reportedly about $5 million has been set aside to train approximately 12,000 servicemen.

These are useful programs, but hardly adequate to meet the needs. The unemployment problem among veterans has reached the proportions of a national crisis. Only an all-out national effort will have an impact on the problem.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

General

Our research leads us to draw a profile of the returning veteran most in need of assistance:

-- He is a young man between 20 and 24 years old.

-- He comes from a lower middle class or disadvantaged background.

-- He holds a high school diploma or less.

-- He saw military service in Vietnam.

-- He received little or no training in civilian-related skills while in the military.

-- He is unlikely to take advantage of his GI educational benefits.

-- He probably is unaware of the various programs of assistance available to him.

This is the veteran we should be reaching. Public and private programs should place their primary emphasis upon providing assistance to these young men, particularly in the area of vocational education and training.

Recommendations

In order to reach this veteran and provide him with the kind of assistance he needs and to which he is entitled, the National Advisory Council on Vocational Education makes the following recommendations:

1. that the Administration establish immediately a system to coordinate all public and private programs of assistance to returning veterans. Either the White House or a designated Federal agency must assume ultimate responsibility for the varied programs affecting Vietnam veterans. Starts

are being made in many areas, but there must be a central authority to coordinate these efforts to prevent duplication and to assure that the various aspects of the programs complement one another to provide the greatest possible benefits to the recipients. Training and education programs must dovetail with outreach programs on the one hand and placement programs on the other. Drug rehabilitation programs must not operate independently; they should be tied to guidance, counseling, and training programs. Programs for the rehabilitation of handicapped veterans should logically lead to occupational training.

2. <u>that a national public information program be launched to inform the returning veteran of the assistance and opportunities available</u>. Too often we find the attitude that the programs are there, and if the vet doesn't want to take advantage of them, that's his fault. The Nation cannot afford that kind of smugness. The veteran must be actively recruited into civilian life with at least as much zeal on the part of the government as was used when he was recruited, or drafted, into the military. A variety of methods can be used other than the traditional government information outlets. These can include radio and television announcements, strategically placed billboards, information programs through local community organizations, contact through minority and ethnic group organizations, and other means of getting the information to the individual in his own community.

3. <u>that greater emphasis be placed on vocational education and job training under the GI Bill</u>. Most veterans tend to think of the education benefits under the GI Bill in terms of college academic programs. In its counseling and public information programs, the Federal government

has generally urged veterans to use their GI benefits for higher education. The highly-motivated and qualified college-bound individual is usually aware of the benefits available and takes advantage of them. Greater stress should be placed on counseling veterans to use their education benefits for vocational and technical programs in adult and vocational schools, universities, community colleges, and private and public vocational-technical schools. If more veterans (as well as non-veterans just out of public school) entered vocational training courses and manpower training programs, the surplus of jobseekers would, at least temporarily, be reduced. They would be increasing their earning capacity and employability rather than seeking immediate employment, which would frequently be in poorly paid entrance jobs. When they did enter the job market, they would be in a much better position to compete for the better jobs. One way to help achieve this goal would be to expand the participation of the Bureau of Adult and Vocational Education of the U.S. Office of Education in programs relating to educational benefits for returning veterans. The National Advisory Council on Vocational Education already has a pilot program for recruiting veterans for occupational education which could readily be expanded into a national program. (See Appendix A).

4. <u>that greater use be made of Vietnam veterans in implementing these programs</u>. No one understands the needs and aspirations of the Vietnam veteran better than one of his fellows. The government should strengthen procedures which give hiring preference to veterans, and loosen some of its

unnecessarily rigid requirements so that greater use of qualified Vietnam veterans can be made in every agency which participates in veterans' assistance programs. This is especially important in those agencies which have initial contact with the returning serviceman such as the Veterans Administration. An effective outreach program must take into consideration the frustration felt by many Vietnam veterans, and recognize that friendly and sympathetic contact with someone who has shared their experiences could be the needed first step in the process of re-entry into civilian life.

Respectfully submitted,

Lawrence Davenport, Chairman

Mrs. Louis Bachman
Lowell A. Burkett
Frank Cannizzaro
Mrs. Joseph Coors
Jerry S. Dobrovolny
Marvin J. Feldman
William Gellman
Jack Hatcher
Mrs. Hugh Hughes
John W. Letson
W.E. Lowry
Duane Lund
Donald N. McDowell
Luis M. Morton, Jr.
Thomas Pauken
George L. Ramey
Norman R. Stanger
Steve W. Stocks
Delfino Valdez

Members, National Advisory Council

Calvin Dellefield,
Executive Director

February 1, 1972

APPENDIX A

Public Information Project on the Returning Veteran

The following information outlines the action taken by various states, in cooperation with the National Advisory Council on Vocational Education, in developing a public information program for returning veterans.

Maine: Production of a 60 second television film, introduced and narrated by Governor Kenneth Curtis. The production costs were underwritten by the New England Resource Center for Occupational Education.

Oregon: Production of a 60 second television film and a 30 second television film, introduced and narrated by Governor Tom McCall. The production costs were underwritten by the Oregon Board of Education.

New Jersey: Production of a 60 second television film and a 30 second television film, introduced and narrated by Governor William Cahill. The production costs were underwritten by the New Jersey Department of Education.

Production of a brochure on "The New Jersey Veteran". The production costs were underwritten by the New Jersey State Advisory Council on Vocational Education.

The project, called "The Governor's Career Team for the Returning Veteran," is made up of the following agencies:

1. Office of the Governor
2. New Jersey Governor's Task Force, Jobs for Veterans
3. New Jersey Department of Labor and Industry
4. New Jersey Department of Education, Division of Vocational Education
5. New Jersey Department of Higher Education, Office of Community Colleges
6. New Jersey Advisory Council on Vocational Education
7. Veterans Administration
8. National Advisory Council on Vocational Education

Florida: The Florida State Advisory Council on Vocational Education has authorized payment for production of a 60 second television film and a 30 second television film, to be introduced and narrated by Governor Rubin Askew. The project will be run through the Florida Department of Education, Division of Vocational Education.

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